

EUTHANASIA OR ASSISTED SUICIDE -- WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURES?

by Rev. Ivan Foster

The word euthanasia is of Greek origin and comes from two words meaning GOOD DEATH. Euthanasia or mercy killing as it is sometimes called, can be traced back to at least pagan Greece and Rome. In those societies it was permissible in some circumstances to help others to die. Infanticide was practised on children who lacked "health and vigour." Voluntary euthanasia, involving a request from a dying patient that life be ended, was an approved custom in several ancient societies. Both Socrates (469 -- 399 bc) and Plato (c.428 -- c.348 bc) sanctioned forms of euthanasia.

Since the mid-30's there has been a campaign mounted in the United Kingdom for the legalising of euthanasia. Similar campaigns have been running in other European countries and the USA. World-wide, the campaign has reached new heights, of late, with a number of legal decisions being made that undoubtedly make the universal acceptance of euthanasia very near to hand. There have been a number of decisions here in the United Kingdom that indicate that this is so.

Tony Bland, the victim of the Hillsborough stadium disaster, who had been in a coma since the accident, had his life support equipment switched off after a court acceded to a request from his family.

Similarly, in Scotland, a hospital was granted leave by a court to stop feeding a brain-damaged woman. That request was likewise supported by the family. The woman was able to breathe on her own but had to be fed by a tube.

Undoubtedly, these cases raise questions of great spiritual and moral importance. They also cause deep distress to the families concerned, and when we differ with some of the decisions that have been made, we do not charge those families with any lack of love or any lack of desire to do what is best for their loved ones.

There is a point where, as far as is known to us, no hope of recovery remains and life is preserved only artificially. It is at that point that serious and prayerful consideration must be given to the matter of allowing nature to take its course and the equipment that is sustaining the signs of physical life to be switched off. We say prayerful consideration for it is apparent to me that in the public discussion that has taken place there has been little or no reference to God and His Word. Decisions of this nature have been taken by families ever since it became possible for medical science to prolong the signs of physical life. I might cite the case of one family who were told that their loved one could be moved from their home to hospital where he could be given treatment that would sustain his life for a few more days. Being Christians and knowing that their loved one was going to be with Christ upon his death, the decision was taken to allow him to die at home.

But it is the absence of any reference to God and His will that will ensure that society in the present debate will make decisions that will be increasingly at variance with God's law.

Widespread acceptance of the justification for the hastening of the death of those who are terminally ill has resulted in the legalising of suicide. In the Northern Territory of Australia, a new law comes into force on July 1st 1996, by which it will be legal to assist people who are terminally ill to end their life. We must say that such is contrary to God's Word. It is murder.

There is a distinction between those who have life signs detectable only by virtue of the functions carried on by machines and those who, though in rapidly declining health, nevertheless are alive due to the independent functioning of their own bodies. For such to hasten their death is to be guilty of self-murder.

Just why society is moving in this direction is what we wish to examine tonight.

The origin of the word euthanasia will help us to understand the philosophy that lies behind the modern campaign in support of it. It is a word that comes from the language of ancient pagan Greece. It represents the thinking of men void of the revelation of God's Word. It is one of the many erroneous views that man's spiritual darkness has produced. Enthusiasm for

euthanasia can flourish only in the absence of gospel light.
Support for euthanasia

I. DEMONSTRATES AN IGNORANCE OF THE TRUTH THAT WE EXIST BEYOND DEATH

Enthusiasts for euthanasia are usually deniers of God and of an existence beyond the grave. They speak of suicide as ending it all.

1. Death does not end our being . Man has a soul that continues to exist beyond this visible world.

2. We go forth to meet God . We are creatures of His hand and must give an account to Him of our deeds during our life. *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment* , Hebrews 9:27.

3. We shall spend eternity in accordance with how we have lived here. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad* , 2 Corinthians 5:10.

II. DEMONSTRATES AN IGNORANCE OF THE TRUE CHARACTER OF MAN

Those who have seen and heard nothing but illness assume that illness is the norm. It is not until they are brought into contact with the healthy that they understand that illness is abnormal. Likewise sinful man accepts sinfulness as normal. He does not see the sinfulness of sin. Only a revelation of the holiness of God can bring the knowledge of his sin and guiltiness home to him. *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*, Luke 5:8. Upon seeing the power of Christ displayed in the miraculous catch of fishes and realising that he was in the presence of God, Peter instantly became aware of his own sinfulness. The experience of Job many centuries before was exactly the same. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes* , Job 42:5-6 We could refer you to Isaiah the prophet's testimony also. Then said I, *Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts* , Isaiah 6:5. A consciousness of our sinfulness and our guiltiness before God will curb any eagerness for death no matter how poor may be the quality of our life. Life at the lowest level on earth is infinitely better than hellfire.

III. DEMONSTRATES AN IGNORANCE OF CHRIST'S POWER TO SAVE

That man needs to escape from the consequences of sin is clear but to leap into a Christless eternity is no escape. To do so shows that man knows nothing of the fullness of life and the eternal joy that may be found in Christ.

1. Man is subject to death because he is a sinner . Death, physical and eternal, is the consequence of Adam's transgression. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners* , Romans 5:12,19. Being born sinners, we add sin to sin and heap up eternal damnation for ourselves.

2. To sinful man there comes a message of salvation. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous* , Romans 5:19. God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, died paying the penalty of sin for His elect. To all mankind there is directed a call to repent and seek God's mercy. Those who obey and believe in Christ receive the benefits of the Saviour's death -- regeneration, justification, sanctification and glorification.

3. Sustained by faith in Christ, the believer calmly awaits the outworking of God's purpose in life and death . The child of God oftentimes has a desire to die. As death draws on that desire intensifies. But it is not so much a desire to escape the circumstances of this life as it is a desire to be with Christ. *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation* , Luke 2:29-30. So said godly Simeon upon seeing the infant Christ in the temple as His mother and Joseph presented Him

to the Lord. *For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better*, Philippians 1:23. Such was the dilemma of the apostle Paul. Christ and Heaven were great attractions to the weary labourer but he still desired to do what he could for the people of God and for sinners who had not yet heard the gospel good tidings.

Therefore he curbed his desire for heaven for the sake of others.

The hope of the child of God is clearly set out in 2 Corinthians 5:5-8. Read it, Christian, for your comfort. Sinner, read it and seek after God's mercy and pardon in Christ that this hope might be yours. Many sinners have sensed the well-being of the child of God and envied his hope in death. *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!* Numbers 23:10. Such a comfortable death belongs only to those who have been made righteous through faith in Christ's finished work upon the cross.

There are many who would never contemplate suicide or euthanasia but who are nevertheless engaged in self-destruction. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help*, Hosea 13:9. They are holding on to that which is destroying them and refuse the only hope of salvation. Your sins will destroy you forever in Hell. They shall carry you down to the everlasting burnings and yet you love them and hold on to them. Is this not the spirit of self-destruction at work?

I call upon you today to flee from your sins, to flee from the wrath of God that will surely fall upon them, and seek refuge in the wounds of Christ upon the tree.

Be not as those referred to by Isaiah the prophet, who deceived themselves. *Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves*, Isaiah 28:15. There is no hope in such a refuge but there is a refuge of hope. *Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast*, Psalm 57:1.

This is the refuge that you should seek --TODAY.